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## Letter dated 27 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a memorandum on the situation of human rights in the Union of Myanmar (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 67 (c).

(*Signed*) Kyaw Tint **Swe**
Ambassador
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**Annex to the letter dated 27 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

# Memorandum on the situation of human rights in the Union of Myanmar

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06-59446

# MEMORANDUM ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS *IN THE UNION OF MYANMAR*

## I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly at its 60th session adopted on 23 December 2005 a resolution entitled, " Situation of human rights in Myanmar " (resolution 60/233). The country-specific resolution was initiated by the European Union. Myanmar rejected the unsubstantiated allegations in the resolution and dissociated itself from its adoption.

2. The resolution is patently wrong. The allegations are baseless and emanate from remnants of insurgent groups and anti-government elements who are carrying out a disinformation campaign, aided and abetted by some Western countries. It is a blatant attempt by those countries to channel the political process in Myanmar in the direction of their choice. This is in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations, both in letter and spirit.

3. Accordingly, in the Third Committee of the 60th session of the General Assembly a motion was proposed to adjourn the debate on the draft resolution. The motion won the widespread support of the Non-Aligned Movement member countries but was opposed by the Western countries. Myanmar considered that it was inappropriate for the Third Committee to devote time on a country-specific human rights situation as the Human Rights Council had been established with the adoption of the General Assembly resolution 60/251.

4. On 15 September 2006, a powerful State, in pursuit of its political agenda, manipulated to unjustifiably place the issue of Myanmar on the Security Council agenda alleging that Myanmar poses a threat to international peace and stability. This move not only displayed a glaring abuse of the mandate of the Security Council by its Member State, but also revealed, once again, its real intention. Myanmar enjoys close and cordial relations with all her neighbours and it can by no means threaten peace and security of any country, let alone regional or international peace and security.

5. This Memorandum is circulated to provide accurate information on the developments on various aspects that have taken place in Myanmar. These include the sustained efforts made by the Government to fulfill the right to development of the 54 million people of Myanmar.

## II. Brief Political Background of Myanmar

6. Myanmar is a multi-ethnic sovereign country where over 100 ethnic nationalities have lived in weal and woe since time immemorial. Unfortunately, the country fell under the colonial domination in 1885. Seeds of discord and disunity were sown among the nationalities as a result of the "divide and rule" policy of the British colonialists. Consequently, three months after Myanmar regained independence on 4 January 1948, numerous armed insurgencies broke out in the country. This tragic situation was prolonged over five decades and affected the country's stability. It took a heavy toll on the country politically, economically and socially. Successive governments were unable to find a lasting solution to the problem of insurgency in the country. It was only under the present government that the insurgency problem was resolved.

7. The *Tatmadaw* (the Armed Forces) was compelled to assume responsibilities of State in September 1988 to stem the anarchy and lawlessness that had pushed the country to the brink of disintegration. The *Tatmadaw* Government abolished the single party socialist system as well as the rigid centralized economy and embarked on instituting reforms for a multiparty democratic system and a market-oriented economy.

8. The Government realized that as long as national unity cannot be consolidated on a firmer footing, a vast array of issues would continue to persist, impeding national endeavours. It therefore enunciated a set of 12 political, social and economic objectives to address fundamental issues facing the nation. It initiated a process to consolidate national unity. Accordingly, the Government gave top priority to building national unity and made peace overtures to all armed groups with sincerity and goodwill.

9. These efforts resulted in the return to the legal fold of 17 out of 18 armed insurgent groups with different political affiliations who are now extensively engaged in respective regional development programmes. The Government is still continuing its efforts to hold peace talks with the last remaining armed group, the KNU. A ceasefire with all the 17 armed groups remains in place and the representatives of these groups are actively participating in the National Convention process.

10. Today, the insurgency problem has virtually come to an end. Peace and stability now prevails in almost all corners of the nation, paving the way for the Government to focus its attention on the economic development of the country including the far-flung border areas. This constitutes an unprecedented striking political achievement in the consolidation of national unity.

11. The Government convened a National Convention in 1993 with the participation of the National League for Democracy (NLD) to formulate basic principles for drafting of an enduring democratic State constitution. However, in 1995, the NLD boycotted the process and withdrew its participation. For that reason the Convention had to be adjourned until 2004. The unilateral move by the NLD thus delayed the process.

12. The National Convention was reconvened from 17 May 2004 to 9 July 2004 as the first and foremost crucial step of the seven-step road map for transition to democracy, which was announced by the Government on 30 August 2003. The NLD was also invited to attend the first resumed session, but NLD, after initially accepting the invitation to attend the reconvened National Convention, reversed its stand just 3 days before the scheduled opening of the first session and did not participate.

13. The National Convention has held four sessions. It convened its fourth session on 10 October 2006 and is now in progress to debate on the remaining chapters. The National Convention is the only forum where all strata of the society including representatives of ethnic groups and political parties are represented. The Government firmly believes that the Convention is the only forum that can guarantee a smooth transition to democracy in Myanmar.

14. The Government is striving to ensure stability of the State, economic development and democratic reform as aspired to by the people. In order to transform the nation into a modern, developed and disciplined democratic State, the Government has been laying down the necessary foundations, namely ensuring the prevalence of peace, tranquility and the rule of law; accelerating economic progress; and human resource development. Substantial progress is being made in building firm foundations for the future democratic nation.

## III. Recent political developments in Myanmar

15. On 30 August 2003, the Government of Myanmar outlined a seven-step road map for transition to democracy. The road map was welcomed overwhelmingly in the country and was well received by neighbours and friends of Myanmar. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), at its Summit held in Bali, Indonesia, in November 2003, welcomed the positive developments in Myanmar and characterized the road map as a "pragmatic approach deserving understanding and support". The Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to a communication from the Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar in September 2003, also stated that he was encouraged by the adoption of the Government of its own road map for a transition to democracy and committed the United Nations to help facilitate the effort.

16. The Government has been steadfastly implementing the seven-step road map to democracy. The first crucial step of the road map was the reconvening of the National Convention on 17 May 2004. The Convention was attended by 1,088 delegates. Of the total, 633 were from the national races. In addition, 105 delegates, representing 17 major and 17 smaller armed groups, who returned to the fold, also attended the Convention.

17. The National Convention has met in four sessions since the announcement of the seven-step road map in August 2003 and is making substantial progress as 75 percent of its work has already been completed.

18. As the issues are complex, discussions at the National Convention are intense, requiring patience and tact. With national solidarity being the top priority of the country, due regard is given to the views expressed by the national races which are accommodated as far as possible. It is essential to strike a balance and to incorporate the different points of views expressed by various groups with fairness in the interest of the national races on the one hand, and that of the nation as a whole on the other.

19. After the National Convention has laid down the basic principles, the new Constitution will be drafted and subsequently presented to the people in a referendum. Subsequently, free and fair elections will be held in which the people of Myanmar will elect leaders of their choice. The process of transformation of the country into a democratic State will move ahead step by step in accordance with the road map.

## IV. Cooperation with the United Nations

20. Cooperation with the United Nations is the cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy. Myanmar has been consistently cooperating with the United Nations in many fields including in the area of human rights. Although Myanmar has dissociated itself consistently from the resolutions on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar due to their high degree of politicization, to demonstrate the spirit of cooperation with the United Nations, Myanmar welcomed the visits of former Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Mr. Razali Ismail to the country on 14 occasions and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro on 6 occasions during his 6-year mandate.

21. Myanmar is consistently cooperating with the United Nations in the field of human rights by providing necessary information and responding to communications sought by the UN bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights and its country and thematic rapporteurs.

22. The Government of Myanmar also maintains close contact with senior officials of the United Nations. In April 2005, the Head of State of the Union of Myanmar H.E. Senior General Than Shwe met and held discussions with the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the Asia-Africa Summit in Jakarta and extended an invitation to the Secretary-General to visit Myanmar.

23. Myanmar's desire to cooperate with the United Nations was further demonstrated in welcoming the visit to Myanmar of Mr. Ibrahim A. Gambari, Under- Secretary-General for Political Affairs of the United Nations, in May 2006. During his visit, Mr. Gambari called on the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council in the new administrative capital and exchanged views on issues of mutual interest. The visit was deemed as successful by all concerned and constituted a new chapter in Myanmar's relationship with the United Nations. The Government has also invited him to visit Myanmar again in the near future.

24. The Government of Myanmar also welcomed the visit of the Deputy Executive Director of the UNICEF Mr. Kul Gautam in August 2006. The Secretary I of the State Peace and

Development Council Lt. Gen Thein Sein, who is also the Chairman of the Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Under-age Children, received the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and exchanged views on cooperation between Myanmar and UNICEF including issues such as protection of children as well as immunization against measles. He was also apprised of the developments in the country as well as the measures taken by the Government to prevent the recruitment of under-aged children into military service.

## V. Combating Illegal Narcotic Drugs

25. According to the UNODC's Report 2005, opium production in Myanmar declined from 2,560 tons to 292 tons, constituting over 80 per cent decrease over a span of eight years from 1996 to 2004. The World Drug Report 2006 also mentioned that in 2005 the total area under opium poppy cultivation decreased by a further 26 percent.

26. The US Government Drug Strategy Report 2005, also acknowledged that opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar declined by 34% in 2003-2004 alone. This data resulted from the joint opium yield survey conducted annually by Myanmar and the United States.

27. Myanmar's success in its war on illicit narcotic drugs was brought about by the Government's firm political will, the end of insurgencies in remote border areas and its effective implementation of its 15-year National Plan for Drugs Elimination since 1999 aiming at total eradication of narcotic drugs by 2014. The 15-year Plan was also complemented by the New Destiny Project which has been initiated since April 2002 to provide support for alternative cash crops to poppy growers who voluntarily surrendered poppy seeds to the authorities. The Government has also destroyed the seized drugs on several occasions successively for the past eighteen years in the presence of diplomatic corps and media.

28. Myanmar's achievements in the fight against illicit narcotic drugs could also be attributed to concrete steps in prevention, treatment and community-based control of drug abuse, including the promotion of alternative development and elimination of illicit drug trafficking and bilateral, regional and international cooperation. At the regional level, Myanmar is working together with the other members of ASEAN to reach its common goal of making the region free from drugs by 2015. Moreover, it has also signed an MOU with six sub-regional countries for the creation of a Greater Mekong Sub-region drugs free zone.

29. Myanmar has signed and ratified international legal instruments relating to control of narcotic drugs and maintains close cooperation with the UNODC. Myanmar spares no efforts to address the emerging threat posed by methamphetamine-type stimulant drugs. In fact, Myanmar neither produces nor imports the precursor chemicals used in the production of these drugs. Myanmar is also closely cooperating with its neighbours for interdiction of these precursor chemicals and in the eradication of the production of methamphetamine-type drugs.

## VI. Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

30. Myanmar recognizes that the process of promoting and protecting human rights should be conducted in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter and international law. Human rights issues must be addressed with objectivity, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Myanmar firmly believes that there should not be double standards nor politicization of human rights issues.

31. Promotion and protection of human rights must be addressed in a global context through a constructive, dialogue-based and non-confrontational approach. Myanmar believes that only cooperation rather than politicization of human rights issues could bring about better improvements in remedying the human rights situations in the world.

32. Like many developing countries, Myanmar attaches great priority to fulfilling the right to development of its entire population. It has been tirelessly striving for the all round development of the country, including the border areas where majority of ethnic nationalities live. The Government has also invested huge amount of its resources for the border areas and rural development programmes.

33. Myanmar strongly supports the position of the Non-Aligned Movement which opposes and condemns selectivity and double standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and exploitation of human rights as pretext for political purposes.

34. Myanmar has long been a victim of a systematic and effective disinformation campaign launched by anti-government elements, generously funded by some Western quarters. Through the internet, they are exploiting every sensitive issue to smear the image of the government in pursuit of their own political agenda. The groundless allegations emanating from anti-government elements have gradually found their way into the Special Rapporteur's reports. Thus, there is a growing need for a thorough verification of the validity of information and the reliability of its sources before including them in the reports of the United Nations.

35. Myanmar is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A National Human Rights Committee was formed in April 2000 and the Committee has been actively engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights. Starting from 2004-2005 academic year, human rights lessons have been introduced as part of the official curriculum in the middle and high schools.

## VII. Allegations about Internally Displaced Persons

36. The vast number of the so-called refugees on Myanmar-Thai border are illegal economic migrants, a view shared both by Myanmar and Thailand. The rest are insurgents and their families, who fled across the border having failed in their armed insurrection. Myanmar and

That authorities have worked out an understanding to resolve the issue of illegal economic migrants by making arrangements for them to become legally documented migrant workers.

37. The return of almost all major armed groups to the legal fold has led to the establishment of peace and stability in the country, including in the border areas where the insurgents used to operate. Only the Kayin National Union (KNU) and the remnants of the former narco-trafficking armed groups are fighting the Government. Counter insurgency campaigns are restricted to a few localities and conducted only against those insurgents that are engaged in acts of terrorism. This is to protect the life and property of peace loving citizens. Since the clashes with the insurgents in the border areas are merely skirmishes restricted to a few localities, they can in no way result in situation of a humanitarian crisis as alleged. The allegations are fabricated and propagated by the insurgents who have fled across the border and their families living under the pretext of refugees, aided and abetted by some organizations opposing the Myanmar Government.

38. There are people living in northern part of the Rakhine State, wrongly labelled as "Rohingya". In reality, they are illegal migrants who through the magnanimity of the Myanmar Government had been allowed to settle there. The matter has been resolved between Myanmar and Bangladesh in a friendly and amicable manner. Since 22 September 1992, over 230,000 returnees have been accepted by the Myanmar Government under safe and voluntary conditions. There remain some 6247 persons to be repatriated whose identities have already been verified. Myanmar has not yet stopped receiving those wishing to return voluntarily. The doors are kept open to welcome back those who meet the requirements. In this regard, Myanmar has been cooperating with Bangladesh and the UNHCR.

## VIII. Child Soldiers

39. The emotive issue of child soldier was exploited by the anti-government groups in cooperation with some NGOs to tarnish the image of Myanmar. The allegation that Myanmar had thousands of child soldiers is preposterous. This groundless allegation emanates from an NGO citing the result of an interview with 20 or so insurgents by a freelance reporter inside a neighbouring country. No United Nations Agency in Myanmar has verified this highly-inflated figure. Yet, this falsehood was cited in the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. The elements of this report eventually found its way into the resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. It is the practice of insurgent groups to recruit and use child soldiers, as testified by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar in his report ( E/CN.4/2003/41 ).

40. In fact, military service is voluntary in Myanmar and under the Myanmar Defence Services Act and the War Office Council directive 13/73, a person cannot enlist in the armed forces until he has attained the age of 18. There is neither a draft system nor forced conscription by the Government. Forced conscription in any form is strictly prohibited. Those who are found to contravene these instructions have had action taken against them under

military law. The army has instituted scrutiny and inspection procedures and it does not accept those who do not conform to the minimum age requirement.

41. The Government established a Committee for the Prevention of the Military Recruitment of Under-age Children on 5 January 2004 to effectively address the issue of under-age recruits. The Committee has also set up a Task Force comprising representatives from relevant line Ministries. The Committee adopted a Plan of Action on 5 October 2004 which includes recruitment procedures, procedures for discharge from military service, reintegration into society, public awareness measures, punitive action, reporting measures, submission of recommendations and consultation and cooperation with the international organizations concerned.

42. As part of the implementation of the Plan of Action, a new Directorate was established on 23 July 2004 under the Office of the Adjutant-General to oversee strict adherence to the orders, regulations and directives in selection process of new recruits, in particular to ensure compliance with the minimum age requirement of 18 years. Military recruits, if found to be under 18 years at the training centres or in the military service, are discharged.

43. Over the years the Government of Myanmar had taken concrete steps to prevent recruitment of under-age children into the military. The Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Under-age Children was enlarged and reinstituted on 3 February 2006 to further strengthen its endeavours. Members of the Committee have made extensive field trips to various regions and have conducted a number of meetings with the Defence Services officials throughout the country. During the field trips, they launched an extensive campaign to promote awareness and stricter enforcement of laws and regulations on recruitments among the military establishments, training institutions and local communities in various parts of the country. Those activities, which include holding of awareness seminars, have contributed significantly in preventing the recruitment of under-age children. Strict enforcement of age limit has resulted in turning away under-age children from joining the army at the screening stage before recruitment. Between 2002 and 2004, a total of 210 children found to be under-aged were discharged from military service. As a result of ongoing screening procedures, 40 more under-age recruits were discharged from their military service during 2005-2006.

44. Myanmar is not a nation in a situation of armed conflict. As 17 out of 18 armed insurgent groups have returned to the legal fold, unprecedented peace and stability is prevailing in almost every corner of the country. However, under tremendous political pressure from some quarters, Myanmar Army (*Tatmadaw Kyi*) has been unjustifiably listed in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of the Children and Armed Conflict. The leaders of Myanmar at the highest level have repeatedly stated that Myanmar army does not recruit soldiers under 18 into military service by law or by practice. The political will of the Government to address the issue has been repeatedly stated by the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations on many occasions.

## IX. Trafficking in Persons

45. Myanmar regards combating trafficking in persons as a national task and has made considerable progress in its fight against human trafficking both in the national and regional context. The Government has instituted awareness-raising activity campaigns coupled with effective law enforcement measures. In addition to the existing Penal Code which contains legal provisions for heavy penalty against perpetrators, the Government enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Law in September 2005. Nationwide preventive and supportive activities, such as awareness raising among the community and its leaders, capacity building of its volunteers, including educational talks on trafficking and violence against women. Supportive services are conducted extensively by the national NGOs. The Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation is also actively engaged in taking measures to prevent trafficking for sexual exploitation including publicizing dangers in borders areas through discussion groups, distribution of printed materials and media programming.

46. Myanmar believes that trafficking in persons is a grave transnational issue and that the elimination of this threat can be ensured only through a coordinated and collective response of all countries concerned. Myanmar has therefore actively participated in the Bali process at the regional level. In a strengthened regional multi-sectoral response in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) through the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative (COMMIT), an agreement was signed in Yangon in October 2004 for cooperation among the GMS countries. As a follow-up to that agreement, a Plan of Action to fight human trafficking was adopted in Hanoi in 2005.

47. In March 2004, Myanmar acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and two of its Supplementary Protocols, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. The Anti-Human Trafficking Law which was recently enacted in Myanmar further demonstrated Myanmar's commitment to combat human trafficking in line with the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

48. The US State Department, in its annual Report in 2006, has alleged that Myanmar does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons and unjustifiably listed Myanmar in Tier 3 of its unilateral classification of such countries. Myanmar has totally rejected the report as it was politically motivated.

49. The Report of the State Department however did acknowledge that Myanmar has made efforts to combat trafficking in persons with regard to prosecution and protection as well as in taking preventive measures. Myanmar has already passed anti-human trafficking law carrying a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Over a thousand traffickers have already been prosecuted since 2002. The Government is also providing basic reintegration assistance to victims, and has developed a teaching curriculum on trafficking. Myanmar remains committed to combating trafficking in persons in both national and regional context, regardless of negative views from those who blindly refuse to recognize the on-going efforts of the Government.

## X. Allegations of Forced Labour

50. Myanmar and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have enjoyed good and cooperative relations since Myanmar joined the Organization in 1948. It is unfortunate that only after four decades of Myanmar's membership, its traditional practice of contributing labour for community projects was seen in negative light and brought before the ILO. The anti-government groups in the disguise of free trade unions exploited the labour issue to pursue their political agenda to bring the issue to the ILO. This eventually led to the filing of complaints by the workers group in June 1996 against Myanmar for the alleged non-observance of ILO Convention 29 (Forced Labour Convention of 1930).

51. In the past, some provisions of the Village Act and Towns Act of 1907, which the Government inherited from the British colonial administration, were alleged to be in conflict with Convention 29. Although those Acts had been in force since 1907, the allegations of forced labour were never leveled critically against Myanmar at the ILO before. The Government of Myanmar to demonstrate its willingness to cooperate with the ILO took the necessary legislative, executive and administrative measures in 1999 and issued two legislative orders: Order 1/99 and Order Supplementing Order 1/99, thereby bringing the domestic legislation in line with Convention 29. Myanmar has since been cooperating with ILO in resolving the issue of forced labour.

52. As part of its cooperative measures with ILO, the Government invited the ILO Technical Cooperation Mission to Myanmar four times during 2001-2002. A high level team of the ILO (HLT) paid a two-week visit to Myanmar in September and October 2001. An agreement between the government and the ILO in March 2002 led to the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in Myanmar. The Government of Myanmar fully cooperated with the ILO Liaison Officer a.i. in dealing with the complaints relating to requisition of forced labour. Actions had been taken against all 50 cases in 2004 and further 8 cases in 2005 reported by the ILO Liaison Officer a.i. A Joint Plan of Action was also initialed by the Government of Myanmar and the ILO in Geneva and Yangon. However, the Joint Plan of Action could not be implemented mainly because some in the ILO attempted to link the implementation with extraneous issues not related to labour.

53. Myanmar also welcomed the visit of a very High-Level Team from ILO (vHLT) in February 2005. The Prime Minister of the Government of the Union of Myanmar received the Team on 22 February 2005 and, in his letter of 10 March 2005 to the vHLT, reiterated Myanmar's commitment to the elimination of the vestiges of forced labour in close cooperation with the ILO. Just a week after the visit of the vHLT to Myanmar, a focal point in the armed forces for dealing with Convention 29, headed by Deputy Adjutant-General and assisted by seven General Staff Officers (Grade-1), was established on 1 March 2005.

54. Despite the positive steps taken by the Government of Myanmar, the 93rd International Labour Conference held in June 2005 reactivated the punitive resolution adopted at its 88ths session. This decision provoked a strong emotional reaction domestically in the country, as the

ILO ignored the plight and suffering of the majority of workers in Myanmar, especially women workers in textile sectors due to the impact of the economic and trade sanctions unilaterally imposed by certain Western countries.

55. Nevertheless, Myanmar is firmly committed to the eradication of forced labour in the country and is exploring every avenue on how to cooperate with the ILO in a mutually constructive manner in the time and space available to Myanmar. A moratorium of six months on a trial basis has been set concerning taking of action against those who submit false cases of forced labour. Both Myanmar and the ILO are involved presently in discussions for the establishment of a mechanism to handle cases of alleged forced labour. A senior level ILO mission visited Myanmar in October 2006 to continue negotiations on the issue. The Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar has acknowledged the progress made in Myanmar's cooperation with the ILO in his recent oral presentation to the Third Committee.

## XI. Religious Tolerance

56. Although Buddhism is the religion of the majority of the people, other religions such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism coexist and flourish in Myanmar. Buddhism is based on tolerance and *metta* (loving kindness). The Government encourages and maintains inter-religious harmony, and freedom of worship is guaranteed by law and practice. In downtown Yangon, a Pagoda, a Church, a Mosque and a Hindu Temple can be seen standing side by side in the vicinity, testifying to the religious harmony and tolerance in Myanmar. Madame Sadako Ogata, a leading United Nations personality, after her visit to the country cited Myanmar as a "model society" for religious tolerance. Any allegations of religious intolerance in Myanmar are groundless and politically motivated.

## XII. Economic and Social Development

57. When the Government took over State duties in 1988, it inherited a deteriorating economic situation under a failing centrally planned economic system. Some critics even predicted that the economy would survive only a few months due to lack of foreign reserves at that time. That proved to be wrong.

58. The Government has made a drastic shift in economic policy, replacing the centrally planned economic system with market-oriented economic system. It has also taken a series of economic reform measures. The Government made a firm resolve to strive for all-round development in a systematic manner by opening its doors to foreign investments and encouraging private sector. Short-term and long-term economic plans were implemented systematically. During the period from 1989-90 to 1991-92, the government focused upon restoring stability in the country while implementing plans to halt the economic slide. In the following years, the economy grew by 7.5 percent during the period from 1992-93 to 1995-96 and 8.5 percent during the period from 1996-97 to 2000-2001.

59. Under the Third Short-Term Five-Year Plan (2001-02 to 2005-06), the economy improved with an average annual growth of 12.5 percent yearly between 2001-2002 and 2004-2005. During 2005-2006 financial year, the average economic growth rate reached 13.2 percent. Per capital income has also significantly increased from Kyat 1800 in 1988 to Kyat 221,217 at present. The salary scales of different levels of the government service have been raised 5 to 11 folds since April 2006. Even the recent report of the IMF acknowledged that Myanmar could achieve 7 percent economic growth this year citing increase in exports of natural gas. Myanmar is not only a food exporting country but also becoming a major source of energy supply in the sub-region.

60. When the first Human Development Report by UNDP came out in 1990, Myanmar was placed in the third category: countries enjoying low human development. Myanmar's steady progress in development was reflected when starting from 7 years back we were elevated to the second category: countries enjoying medium human development. The Human Development Report 2005 gives Myanmar's average annual GDP growth rate between 1990 and 2003 as 5.7 percent. The Governme t of Myanmar, as such, is able to bring about a better standard of living for her people.

61. During its tenure, the Government has made massive investments in infrastructure developments resulting in construction of 179 dams, 208 major bridges and 36,000 miles of roads and 1100 miles of railroads. With a view to narrowing down the gap between rural and urban areas, the Government has been implementing the three National Development Programmes, namely (i) Border Areas Development Programme; (ii) Plan for 24 Special Development Zones and (iii) Integrated Rural Development Plan. This has resulted in significant progress in various sectors, such as health, education, infrastructure and agriculture. Myanmar has scored discernible achievements in carrying out its National Development Programmes reflecting the Millennium Development Goals.

62. In education sector, the Government has been implementing 30-year long-term national education promotion plan. New schools numbering 6778 and 189 universities have been opened in the States and Divisions and the nation has now one school in every one-and-half-mile radius, enabling all citizens to have literacy skills. The adult literacy rate has now reached 94.1 percent, youth literacy rate 94.4 percent; and net primary school enrollment has reached 97.58 percent this year. The Government spares no effort to improve the quality of education. Reforms in the official curriculum and assessment methodology have been undertaken and the use of ICT is strongly encouraged.

63. Health indicators speak for themselves. According to multiple indicator cluster surveys in Myanmar, the total percentage of population with sustainable access to safe drinking water improved from 32 percent in 1990 to 72 percent in 2000, exceeding the Millennium Development Goals of reaching 66 percent by 2015. Access to improved sanitation also increased during the past decade from 36 percent in 1990 to 83 percent in 2000. Myanmar is now free from diseases such as small pox, leprosy and polio. Myanmar has also launched immunization programmes against measles every year since 1987 and the proportion of 1-year

old children immunized against measles has reached 87 in 1998. With a view to reaching total immunization coverage, a programme for vaccination of more than 13 million children against measles is scheduled to commence in November this year with the cooperation of WHO and UNICEF.

64. The under 5 mortality rate had been reduced from 77.7 per 1000 live births in 1999 to 66.6 in 2003. Remarkable progress has also been made in Myanmar's universal salt iodization programme. More than 86 percent of households are now consuming iodized salt and prevalence of goiter dramatically dropped from 33 percent in 1994 to 5.5 percent in 2004.

65. The Government has designated HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis as diseases of national concern and is taking effective measures to address these serious challenges. The National Malaria Control Programme is also under implementation by the Government with its goal being to reduce 50 percent of malaria morbidity and mortality by 2010. The National AIDS Programme and the Joint UN programme for HIV/AIDS have drawn up a joint Programme of Action, covering education, prevention, cure and rehabilitation to address the issue. As a result, the Government is not only able to level the HIV/AIDS infection rate but have been able to reduce it. Myanmar has thus made significant progress in its efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015 particularly in areas such as health, education, access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.

66. Despite the unilateral economic restrictions imposed by some Western countries and their blockage of assistance from international financial institutions for decades depriving the country its right to development, the Government of Myanmar is making progress in its all-out efforts to achieve development throughout the country relying on its own resources to fulfill the economic and social needs of its own people.

## XIII. Conclusion

67. Notwithstanding the economic and social progress achieved through the determined efforts of the Government, there are those who are sounding a false alarm that Myanmar's economy is in shambles with a looming humanitarian crisis and that situation of food security is precarious. This allegation is unfounded and is contrary to the FAO's latest assessment which stated that Myanmar has a low level of under-nourishment of only 5 percent of its population. Moreover, according to the FAO's statistics, food supply in Myanmar has improved since the beginning of 1990s.

68. Since the regaining of her independence in 1948, Myanmar had had to face challenges posed by the ethnic insurgencies. Today, armed insurgency has virtually come to an end in almost every corner of the country. This has resulted in unprecedented prevalence of peace and stability nationwide, providing opportunities for enhanced development activities for the ethnic nationals in the border areas and for the national reconciliation process.

69. Myanmar enjoys close and cordial relations with all her five neighbours and other countries in the region and does not engage in activities aimed at undermining the peace and security of any country. Myanmar by no stretch of the imagination can be considered a threat neither to regional nor international peace and security.

70. Myanmar is today on a delicate path in transition towards democracy. Maintenance of the hard won peace and stability and national unity remains the highest priority.

71. Myanmar has special characteristics that are unique. The democratization process cannot be done overnight. It must be handled with care to avoid bitter experiences of other countries in a similar situation.

72. Undue pressures from outside without understanding of the challenges faced by Myanmar can only hinder the on-going homegrown political process and further complicate the situation. International community can best help Myanmar through understanding, encouragement and cooperation.